

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

SAINT PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

JULY 19, 2020

PROPER 11A

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As Rogers and Hammerstein put it in 1949 in South Pacific

You've got to be taught to hate and fear
You've got to be taught from year to year
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear
You've got to be carefully taught
You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made
And people whose skin is a different shade
You've got to be carefully taught

And then Stephen Sondheim in A Little Night Music 1973 put it

How do you say to your child in the night?
Nothing's all black, but then nothing's all white
How do you say it will all be all right
When you know that it might not be true?
What do you do?

Careful the things you say
Children will listen
Careful the things you do
Children will see and learn
Children may not obey, but children will listen
Children will look to you for which way to turn
To learn what to be
Careful before you say 'Listen to me'
Children will listen

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,” Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,” The Declaration of Independence 1776, Thomas Jefferson, who owned over 600 slaves during his life time and only freed his own children in his will when he died.

“I can’t breathe”, “Don’t shoot” Black lives matter and here we are 500 years later and still dealing of what has been called the United States’“peculiar institution,” and its original sin. From 1620 through 1865 approximately 600,000 people of African decent were transported either directly or via the Caribbean as the property of another human being. That is 5% of the total of 12M persons taken from Africa up to 1890 when Brazil finally banned slavery.

Jesus is talking to fisherman about farming and whether the weeds should be pulled up. A good fisherman would say of course, a farmer should be wise enough to know that the two plants look a lot of like and a lot of the wheat would come up with the weeds. Let them grow together and then the harvesters will be told to sort them out. Is this where we are? Are we so immersed in a culture that has been designed to our advantage by the generations before us that we cannot and perhaps will not see it. How to get the dominate culture to have the discussion that leads to the healing of some very deep wounds that continue to be inflicted.

This is a time that this subject is again rising to to the surface. It has regularly come around in the course of the story of the United States. We even fought a very nasty war over it. Because the side that persisted in that battle did not complete the task of bringing Jefferson’s value statement for the founding of this county to anything close to completion, we continue to struggle with fear and hatred of siblings on this planet.

It seems that our country has to have a convulsion caused by or in response to the reaction to the oppression and guilt of the treatment of the descendants of those

taken from Africa and those who were here 12,000 years before the Europeans happened upon this continent about every 50 years or so. The last major flare up of relations between Blacks and Whites occurred in the 1960s with the Civil Rights Movement, the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act and the reaction by those who were feeling threatened by people who they believed were truly inferior to them.

“History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up their unjust posture; but, as Reinhold Niebuhr has reminded us, groups are more immoral than individuals.” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The 60's-and 70's brought assassinations and riots vs race riots which are the white version of a riot. There was much confrontation between the Civil Rights Movement, the Antiwar Movement and those who were reactionary to the changes that these and other groups were rallying for. When Black groups armed themselves when they discovered that they had the right to carry arms openly and did so in California, gun control became all the rage.

How do people come together when they are so divided and start to hear each other and figure out that they have way more in common and that they would be better off if everyone was better off? How do we learn to trust and as Isaiah speaking for God stated “Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one. *IS. 44:8*

In Education for Ministry (EFM) each of the four years starts out with each student telling their spiritual autobiography. These are telling of how one got to where they are today and the path that got them there. It's an exercise to help you see the movement of God in your life. There are several models for the autobiography from simple timelines, places where you were converted/turned in

some way to a telling of the people who pointed or barred the path that brought you to this point in your journey. EfM calls these exercises soil-turning events and just as in the garden the more balanced work one puts in the better the product

I have been thinking about an autobiography that centers around how we think and react to the “other”. Call it racial, ethnic, bigotries or some other tittle we have all been carefully taught and we have been very good at listening. An exercise to challenge one to see where the ideas came from and how they have been incorporated in the lived experience. I thought I would do a little modeling of this and let you get to know me a little better on the way.

I grew up in the Western Mississippi River drainage area. My father was a printer and veteran of World War II. He spent three years in the Army Air Corp in the Pacific theater and was on Iwo Jima at the end of the war. My mother was a reporter for the Chicago Times before it merged with the Sun and was laid off when she got married because the men coming back from the war needed jobs. I born in a near north suburb of Chicago and we moved to Independence, KS shortly after I was born to help care for my grandmother. It was there that I was baptized into the Episcopal Church. My three sisters were born in Independence.

It was in Independence that I first encounter, but hardly consciously remember contact with Blacks. This connection came to consciousness 50 years later when I was doing Clinical Pastoral Education and family stories and pictures came home to rest. I remember a picture of me, as a very chunky infant, sleeping in the lap of an old Black man, who was also asleep, in a rocking chair, on my grandmother’s sun porch. The family stories are that this man, Pink White by name, would not let anyone carry me anywhere. I was his charge. It turns out that he was born in Mississippi before the Emancipation Proclamation. He had been born a slave. This was the main human nurturing I received as an infant as mom always had an interesting time with post partum depression after each of us. I am still searching for that picture.

Other family stories about my grandmother is that she would open her house to the Blacks in town when the whites would start to riot. Independence is 80 miles north of Tulsa, OK infamous for the Greenwood massacre in 1921. I started elementary school in in Independence as the school was integrated long before Brown vs The Board of Education in Topeka.

During first grade we moved to Wilmette, IL a near North suburb of Chicago. The town was very White and middle to upper middle class. Chicago was a different story and under Richard J. Daly practiced all the ills of the 40's, 50 , and 60's. Red lining which meant the Southside and West Sides became predominantly Black and then predominantly interstate highways. Then the 'Projects' were built and were a disaster, more from the lack of support, inclusion in society, decent school and jobs than anything else. We always heard how terrible and unsafe the projects were. Most of the suburbs had sundown laws still on the books. So all Blacks and in some cases Jews had to be out of town by sundown.

I finished elementary school in Baton Rouge, LA in 1959. We drove to Baton Rouge, again in the middle of the school year and I remember driving through Vicksburg, MS with Land of Lincoln license plates on the car and sensing the animus as we stayed the night there. Desegregation had started in earnest and we were very aware of what was going on in the country, my parents were newspaper people and news junkies and the principal of the school in Baton Rouge was a Baptist preacher and the morning school prayer moved to the segregation side of things.

I must say that my parents worked very hard at balancing what we heard from the outside countering most of what we were exposed to in the media and outside the house. They were willing to talk about what was going on and why a lot of it was wrong and the need to level the playing field and give all an equal shot at the "American Dream".

The next big move was back though Wilmette for two years and on to Pierre, SD for what would have been my freshman year but their middle school went though 9th grade. My dad was a dam worker and I got my first Social Security job working for the movie theater company in town. Pierre was also very White with a mix of Sioux tribal members forming a small minority. It is a place that just was and we moved on.

My last three years of high school was in the South Chicago Suburbs built up by White flight and block busting in Chicago. It was about this time that the courts were starting to focus on the injustice of these practices and the different government entities were starting to be held accountable for the practices, including the Federal Government for its red lining practices. My parents biggest fight occurred during this time as my mother wanted to become a freedom rider and finally my father said that if she left, she had to take the kids with her.

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider.”
MLK

Marches and riots were beginning to happen. As I was preparing to go into the Navy in 1968 the riots continued and assassinations were happening. Not just well know leaders but it turned out later, the Chicago Police along with a tactical unit and the FBI were found to have assassinated Fredrick Allen Hampton (August 30, 1948 – December 4, 1969) and another Black Panther activist. The Democratic Convention in Chicago turned into what was later dubbed a police riot.

During my Navy time I was a corpsman and in 1969 when I arrived in Jacksonville, NC along with the Black nurse LT CDR who had been my Corps

school instructor, we were greeted outside of the Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune by a large billboard with a rider in a white hood and robes, on a white horse sticking up about the top of the board, welcoming us to Klu Klux Klan Country. Earlier in the year I had run into the American Nazi Party in Chicago at a speech given by Dr Martin Luther King and Jessie Jackson. The rhetoric was sickening and frightful and just made one sad to be reminded that such sickness still exists in this world

The arrogant rise up against me, O God,
and a band of violent men seeks my life; *
they have not set you before their eyes.
But you, O Lord, are gracious and full of compassion, *
slow to anger, and full of kindness and truth. PS 86:14-15

When I got out of the Navy and they offered to send Mary Ann and me back to Chicago, we demurred, and said we wanted to stay in Mount Vernon. So in 1972 Mount Vernon became our permanent home. It was here that I started my nurses training and came into contact with people of Mexican descent, for the first time. Two of whom would become important mentors as I learned the skills that they isn't taught in nursing school. And one gentleman whom I do miss now but we connected well.. He was or maybe still is a gang member who has served a couple sentences at the State Reformatory at Monroe. He came out of a country where the police are totally corrupt and into a place where the police are not always Officer Friendly. It was a hard lesson for me because I have had to rely a lot on the police when I was working on the ambulance and in the Emergency Department. Even dealing with the police in Chicago who could be corrupt, the Sargents from the Summerdale Precinct were caught cleaning out the local Ace Hardware in Wilmette and most drivers kept an emergency \$20 bill clipped to their driver's licence. They have a very tough job and the vast majority of the ones I have meet over my life have been exceptional people but that doesn't change what we have increasingly required of them over the last 50 years. The demands on them and the focus of what their vocation has to change.

That is my story and I challenge you to wrestle with your own version and vision of it. +Greg calls himself a recovering racist and I would come to that same conclusion. Not from the point of hate or fear but from the point of privilege. I have lived inside the privilege of being the dominate culture but having been a nurse has granted a taste of what it means not to be a part of the dominant group.

A final quote from Dr King and his letter from thee Brimingham Jail.

I guess I should have realized that few members of a race that has oppressed another race can understand or appreciate the deep groans and passionate yearnings of those that have been oppressed, and still fewer have the vision to see that injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent, and determined action. Letter From Birmingham Jail 1963

And a theme we need to listen to from Matthew, Mark and Abraham Lincoln:

And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. Mark 3:25

He knew what they were thinking and said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. Matthew 12:25

"A house divided against itself, cannot stand."

I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free.

Abraham Lincoln 1858 Illinois Republican Party's nomination as that state's US senator